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Coronavirus epidemic: Italy quarantines millions in lockdown around Venice and Milan

Sunday 8 March 2020, by [Press Agencies](#) (Date first published: 8 March 2020).

- **Italy has recorded the most deaths from COVID-19 of any country outside China**
- **Lombardy is the hardest hit region in Italy, the epicentre of Europe's coronavirus outbreak**

Italy's prime minister announced a sweeping coronavirus quarantine Sunday, imposing restrictions on the movement of about a quarter of the country's population in a bid to contain a widening outbreak.

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte signed a decree after midnight that imposes restrictions to the movement of people in the region of Lombardy and in at least 15 provinces. The measures will be in place until April 3.

"For Lombardy and for the other northern provinces that I have listed there will be a ban for everybody to move in and out of these territories and also within the same territory," Conte said. "Exceptions will be allowed only for proven professional needs, exceptional cases and health issues."

There were chaos and confusion in the northern Italian city of Padua in the Veneto region as word spread late Saturday evening that the government was planning to announce the quarantine.

Packed bars and restaurants quickly emptied out as many people rushed to the train station in Padua.

Travellers with suitcases, wearing face masks, gloves and carrying bottles of sanitising gel shoved their way on to the local train.

Italy on Saturday saw its biggest daily increase in coronavirus cases since the outbreak began in the north of the country on February 21.

In its daily update, Italy's civil protection agency said the number of people with the coronavirus rose by 1,247 in the last 24 hours, taking the total to 5,883. Another 36 people also died as a result of the virus, taking the total to 233.

Around the world, more and more countries were bracing for a big increase in virus cases. Western countries have been increasingly imitating China - where the virus first emerged late last year, and which has suffered the vast majority of infections - by imposing travel controls and shutting down public events.

After the city of Venice cancelled its cherished Carnival and governments warned citizens against travel to Italy, the epicentre of Europe's outbreak, the country is facing a possible recession. Hotel occupancy rates in the lagoon city are down to about 2 per cent.

"The surface of the Grand Canal is like glass because the boats that transport merchandise are not there. On the vaporetti (water buses), there are only five or six people," Stefania Stea, vice-president of the Venice hoteliers association, said.

Ministers decided at an all-night emergency meeting that broke up early Saturday to call in retired doctors as part of an effort to bolster the strained healthcare system with 20,000 additional staff.

The head of the Italian ruling coalition's junior partner became the latest high-profile figure to confirm they had been infected.

"I am fine," the Democratic Party's Nicola Zingaretti said on Facebook. "I will have to stay at home for the next few days."

The accelerating spread of the illness has already emptied Italian train stations and Rome's normally busy streets.

Many of the city's outdoor restaurants and cafes were either closed on Saturday night or had free tables overseen by forlorn staff with little to do but chat.

"The situation here in Rome really is catastrophic," city guide Francesca Sposito said outside the Colosseum.

But the government's most immediate concern is that northern virus-hit regions might start to run out of hospital beds.

Milan's Lombardy region "is facing a tense situation," civil protection service chief Berrelli told reporters.

On Sunday, Pope Francis is to recite the Angelus prayer at a distance from worshippers as the Vatican steps up its efforts to prevent the further spread of the new coronavirus.

The pope will recite the prayer from the window of the Vatican Apostolic Library, from where it will be live-streamed onto large screens in St Peter's Square and distributed to the media.

In countries where the virus is already present, the number of cases continued to increase.

In Britain, the Department of Health said the number of cases had increased to 206, up from 163 the day before. Two people in the country have died of the coronavirus.

France has 716 confirmed cases with 11 deaths, according to a report by France 24 news site.

The Czech Republic also has 21 people infected, after two more tested positive on Saturday, Prime Minister Andrei Babis said.

European governments and the public stepped up their preparations amid concerns at the outbreak's continued spread.

Measures included cancellations of events, school closures and other ways to mitigate the wider effects of the virus.

In Germany, which has almost 800 cases, the issue is expected to dominate a meeting of coalition leaders on Sunday, where politicians are to consider measures to protect the economy, according to reports.

Associated Press, Agence France-Presse, DPA

P.S.

- South China Morning Post. Published: 2:23am, 8 Mar, 2020:
<https://www.scmp.com/news/world/europe/article/3074112/coronavirus-italy-virus-death-toll-tops-230-cases-near-6000>